Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Region One
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Kalispell, MT 59901
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Ref:DV222-00
August 25, 2000

TO: Environmental Quality Council, Capitol Building, Helena, 59620-1704
Dept. of Environmental Quality, Metcalf Bldg., PO Box 200901, Helena, 59620-0901
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Director's Office – Rich Clough
Parks Division – Jeff Erickson
Fisheries Division – Dorothy Lindsay
Legal Unit
Montana Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office, 225 North Roberts, Veteran's Memorial Building, Helena, 59620-1201
Montana State Library, 1515 East Sixth Ave., Helena, 59620-1800
Jim Jensen, Montana Environmental Information Center, PO Box 1184, Helena, 59624
George Ochenski, PO Box 689, Helena, 59624
Wayne Hirst, Montana State Parks Foundation, PO Box 728, Libby, 59923
Montana State Parks Association, PO Box 699, Billings, 59103
Joe Gutkoski, President, Montana River Action Network, 304 N 18th Ave., Bozeman, 59773-8298
Rep. Stanley Fisher, 76 Golf Terrace, Bigfork, 59911
Sen. Bob Keenan, Box 697, Bigfork, 59911-0697
Rep. Rob Raney, 212 S. 6th, Livingston, 59047
Flathead County Library, 247 First Avenue E, Kalispell, 59901
Flathead County Library, Bigfork Branch, PO Box 472, Bigfork, 59911
Flathead County Commissioners, 800 S. Main, Kalispell, 59901

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks has completed an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Crater Lake rehabilitation project. During a public comment period from July 10 through August 7, 2000, two comments were received, one in favor of the project and one opposed to the use of piscicide, but favoring the need to address the exotic trout in Crater Lake.

Therefore, based on the comments and agreements for the need to remove the exotic trout, the draft EA becomes the final EA. A copy of the Decision Document is enclosed for your information.

Sincerely,

Dan Vincent
Regional Supervisor

DV/nli
Enclosure

Flathead 25

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT AND DECISION NOTICE
FOR THE REMOVAL OF HYBRID RAINBOW X WESTSLOPE CUTTHROAT TROUT
FROM CRATER LAKE
August 18, 2000

Project proposal:

1. To chemically rehabilitate Crater Lake using Rotenone piscicide to remove rainbow trout and rainbow x westslope cutthroat hybrids. This will eliminate the threat of contaminating the strongest remaining native westslope population in Hungry Horse Reservoir and the South Fork Flathead River.

2. To restock the lake with genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout of the M012 strain from the Anaconda State Fish Hatchery.

Site location and characteristics:

Crater Lake is located in Flathead County in the Flathead National Forest east of the town of Kalispell. Its legal description is T27N, R18W, S8&9. The lake is 23.4 surface acres with a maximum depth of 75 feet.

Project justification:

Between 1938 and 1967 the lake was stocked with a generic strain of cutthroat trout. Subsequent testing of this strain indicated it was largely comprised of Yellowstone cutthroat genes. From 1975 to present, the lake has been stocked with the 012 strain of westslope cutthroat trout. In 1986 Crater Lake fish were tested for genetic purity and found to be hybridized rainbow and westslope cutthroat. In 1997 the lake was sampled for genetics once again to evaluate the population status, and rainbow genes were still represented at unacceptable levels. Based on this information, FWP biologists determined it was prudent to implement an alternative method of removing the exotic trout from Crater Lake. The proposed method will involve using a piscicide.

Environmental impacts of project:

No adverse effects are expected for plants, adult amphibians, reptiles, birds, wild mammals, or humans. Some crustaceans are likely to be affected, but will repopulate the lake to near normal levels generally within one calendar year. Because Crater Lake is located at 5,975 feet in elevation, it does not provide a suitable food source for traditional fish-eating birds and raptors including, but not limited to, common loons, bald eagles, and osprey.

Social impacts:

Statewide angler pressure estimates indicate use to be between 47 and 304 angler days per year. Mean estimated annual angler days are 183 per year. Given the proximity to other fisheries, it is believed that traditional Crater Lake anglers may use adjacent lakes for recreational angling during the post treatment and initial restocking and growth period. The lake is isolated from most anglers by virtue of being situated in remote and rugged-mountainous terrain. Angling may continue within 1.5 years after restocked fish are of catchable size.

Public involvement:

In compliance with the Montana Environmental Policy Act, an environmental assessment was prepared and circulated for public comment from July 7 through August 7, 2000. Notices were advertised in the local newspaper, and copies of the EA were made available at local libraries and FWP, Region 1, headquarters in Kalispell.

Public involvement (continued):

- One comment was received in favor of all aspects of the project.
- One comment was received in opposition to the use of Rotenone piscicide, but favored the need to address the exotic trout in Crater Lake.
- One interview was requested by a local newspaper to prepare an article outlining the project during the comment period.

Decision notice:

Based on the comments and agreements for the need to remove the threat posed by exotic trout from Crater Lake, I recommend that the proposed project is implemented to fulfill the desired outcome of restoring the lake with genetically pure native westslope cutthroat trout.

8/25/00

Dan Vincent, Region One Supervisor
MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Date